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The Greenland Policy of the New
Order - Attempt at an Evaluation
by
Mads LIDEGAARD
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The Greenland Policy of the New Order

Attempt at an Evaluation

By Mads Lidegaard

I believe that the majority of those present in this assembly know the film "Where the Mountains Float", which was produced at the start of the New Order in 1950 and deals with Greenland at the transition from old to new. There is a naive, boy scout-type optimism in the description of the old life of the hunters, to which one is forced to say a nostalgic, but definite farewell, so that it can be replaced by the new life, by that hectic, technological activity of the city, which entices the young hunter and his family in the film to move in, and promises them a light and happy future.

In 1965 Jørgen Roos produced his film about Greenland, "Sisimiut", which is no doubt also well-known in this assembly. Undeniably the Greenland we meet here is quite different: Whichever opinion one may have of the film, it does reflect clearly the chaotic confusion and uncertainty, the disillusioned mood, which is the characteristic picture of Greenland today, in a way both as concerns the Greenlanders themselves and those sent to Greenland - and undoubtedly even all those others who are involved

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down here in what is happening up there.

If we confine ourselves to the Danish group, to the officials here in Denmark, to those sent to Greenland now or previously, to politicians and members of the press, it can hardly be denied that the mood has been rather dark in later years: A certain disappointment about those expectations which were not fulfilled, an increasingly stronger apprehension for the future, a growing uncertainty whether we are doing the right things - and in many, I suppose, a definite disgust with the way things are happening in Greenland.

We all had our beautiful dreams. It was going to happen so quickly and end up so well, if only we took over. And today we stand rather ashamed with the big question on our lips: Why did it not develop the way we thought?

That is the question I will try to answer. What is it that we do wrong? Why have we not succeeded in bringing the Greenlanders into an active and positive development process despite the enormous efforts which have been made in the country? I will try to examine the way of thinking, on which our policy during the last 20 years was based, and to evaluate whether it has been and is valid - and maybe in this way find out where the source of error is located.

I will not do it in the way of those wise after the event or with better insight. If anything has been done wrong, we are all guilty, if our thinking was wrong, we must all be interested in having it corrected. We are all humble before the destiny of the people that it is all about, and there is therefore no sense in throwing stones. p.162

I am afraid that we have a complete set of wrong conceptions which are still affecting our way of thinking, and which have determined our approach in Greenland. I will try to deal with them one by one:

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The social concept. We believe that man is mainly a product of his social circumstances and will change with these, will develop positively if hunger and disease and poverty are eliminated, - and that thereby he will possess the decisive conditions for satisfaction and happiness and harmony.

Those 20 years have taught us that many things are more important than social security: The self-respect of man, his ability to survive in competition with others, to meet the demands of his environment, to be accepted and respected by others, to have a place to stand in life. If these things are not available, if they maybe even are spoilt by the social efforts, then these efforts will hardly have any real positive effect. We cannot save the human dignity of the Greenlanders by Danish money and workers. In reality, money can never be the primary part of a process of development. It is and should be the fruit of the development, which should only be determined by the people's own efforts, if it is to be sound and able to survive. These efforts can then be supported from outside as a supplement, but the supplement should never become all.

In this connection I will allow myself to quote part of a speech made by President Nyerere of Tanzania recently, specifically concerning problems of development:

"Development brings freedom, if it is development of people. But people cannot be developed. They can only develop themselves. For while it is possible for someone from outside to build a man's house, the stranger cannot give the man pride and self-confidence as a human being. These things can only be created by a man inside himself through his own actions. He develops through whatever he does, - through making his decisions, through increasing his understanding of what he does - and why he does it. Through increasing his own knowledge and skill and through

his own participation - on an equal basis - in the life of his community.

In this way, for instance, a man develops when he himself provides for his family and himself; he does not develop if others give him these things. He develops through improving his education - not if he only executes the orders of somebody better educated without understanding why these orders were given. He develops through participating in a free discussion about a new plan or project and through participating in the subsequent decision. But he does not develop if he is led like an animal into a project which has already been organized.

In reality development of a man can only be carried out by the man himself. Development of a people can only be carried out by the people itself."

All men are equal. As an expensive heritage from World War II p.163 we have the firm dogma that there is no difference between men of the many races on earth, that we are all equal, basically. No doubt it is this - one might nearly say necessary - attitude which makes us go even a step further and believe that all men therefore also will react the same way to the same challenges, - and in this connection that the Greenlanders thus will react like Danes, if we organize things in Greenland the same way as down here. What is good for us must therefore also be good for them.

But this, of course, is a false analogy. For however equal men are biologically, they cannot avoid being characterized deep in their soul by the culture, the way of thinking, and the tradition found in each group, - and they will therefore also react quite differently to the events of life in many decisive respects. Naturally the Greenlanders are different from the Danes, even very different, since they represent an arctic culture of hunters whose way of life in nearly all respects differed

extremely much from the farmer's life of the Danes. And furthermore the whole organization of their community, and the conditions dictated by nature to this community, are so different from ours that it would be very strange if the same laws and institutions were suitable in both communities.

The dream about national unity. The thought of a durable union of Greenland and Denmark, as a shining example to a frustrated world, as a confirmation of our own special admirability, easing a tainted conscience - and undoubtedly also as an honestly meant goodwill towards the Greenlanders, has more than any other single motive been the ideological battering ram for the great efforts under the New Order. The thought has developed and has grown very strong in both groups of people, and in certain circles it has had an inviolability of nearly religious character.

In reality, the position of Greenland has, of course, never been clearly defined, and actually the Greenlanders are already conducting double politics, which means both greater integration and the opposite, - and in actual fact a certain national consciousness is already a living reality in Greenland. We must face the fact that the great mass of the people of Greenland has still not expressed itself politically, - we have to face the fact that a higher economical and educational level everywhere in the world has meant a stronger national consciousness. There is no reason to believe that this should not be the case in Greenland. The Danish efforts in Greenland are resting on the wrong foundation if they are based one-sidedly on the unity of the country. And they are hardly reciprocated by a feeling in Greenland of solidarity with Denmark. It is wrong if higher priority is given to unity than to the human welfare of the Greenlanders. This does not mean that we place less importance on unity, but it means that we realize that there is something which may be

more important.

The dream about equal status. Danes in Greenland have very often felt themselves as crusaders for the introduction of the ideals of human rights as regards the equality of all men (and mostly we have thought that we were creating this equality by arranging everything as at home). In an article in Kontakt this fall Niels Højlund pointed out p.164 how exactly this fixed idea had become a hindrance for both parts: For the Danes, because in their idealistic striving towards this high aim they did not consider the harsh realities, which rather should have been decisive for their efforts: The human conditions and those dictated by nature in Greenland. And for the Greenlanders, because they have been more occupied by checking whether the Danes really live up to these ideals than by trying themselves to assist in realizing them.

We are used to see something positive and exalted in these beautiful ideals, but if they misguide people so they lose themselves in airy dreams and thereby fail to meet the harsh, but unavoidable demands of daily life, then these ideals may be unfortunate. We have been far too inclined to give the Greenlanders the impression that equal status was right around the corner. We have sadly neglected to explain to them that economically an actual equal status will probably never be realized - and that the price for this in any case would be very high, even on a national basis.

Belief in the power of the example. We have had a strangely firm belief that sending Danes to Greenland was beneficial, not only because of their actual efficiency, but also because the idea has existed that they through their example would infect the Greenlanders and make them imitate their idols.

First of all it shows a very antiquated pedagogical approach to expect that such imitation should have a positive effect. Secondly, the danger of the presence of the many people sent out was overlooked, namely that they through their luxurious living standard, their efficient milking of the public funds, their fat overtime pay system, their lack of solidarity and contact with the local community, etc., in many ways have set a very bad example for those people who exactly required to learn about solidarity and sound economy.

The desire for development. We have believed that in the same way every Dane - due to our pattern of life and worship of living standard and money - quite naturally is predisposed towards development and better living standard, thus the Greenlanders had to be. But there is a difference between desiring certain things that you can see in front of you - and desiring development for its own sake. A people of hunters is used to receive everything as a gift from the hand of nature, and not used to development. And in actual fact it has turned out that the Greenlanders were not at all prepared for everything we wanted to make out of them. We have transferred our own requirements to the Greenlanders and have believed they were theirs too. We have listened to the desires of the ruling elite in Greenland for development - and have believed that they spoke for the people.

We are now starting to understand that we must not only help the development along - first of all we must make the people desire development, and that is not easy at all. We thought that Greenlanders would react just about as the Europeans to the Marshall Aid Plan, for instance - through multiplying its useful effect by own efforts, so that it resurrected Europe with amazing speed.

To this are added other thoughts - for instance, about the richness of the fish resources and the impending end of the hunting culture. All in all a series of conceptions, which have played an enormous role, but which have hardly been durable. p.165

It should just be mentioned here that the whole of this way of thinking is not taken directly from that great report which started the whole New Order in 1950. On the contrary, the report appears to be far more realistic on a number of points than the policy it started. The commission emphasizes strongly that the Danish support "of economical, technical, and administrative character cannot in itself bring about that improvement of the cultural and social standard of the people of Greenland which it is the aim to strive towards, but that a considerable effort by the people itself is also required." Undeniably the question turns up, where the other philosophy originated.

Efficiency. Our whole evaluation of the technical efficiency of any development is not only one-sided in itself. It also leads us directly into a bad relation to our local environment in Greenland. For the more a Dane judges everything from this point of view, the harder must his judgement necessarily be towards these people, whose main characteristic is exactly that they are not efficient.

Thus it appears that we have here found how a number of our premises, the basis of our thinking, have been untenable. The next point must be to evaluate the consequences of this, to look closer at the disease caused by the wrong policy. And if we realize that what we aim at is development, and at the same time that this development has not progressed sufficiently, then the next question must be: Then what is required to make people develop themselves? What conditions must be filled before this can happen? What

can motivate people to make efforts and cooperate in a development so that it becomes their own?

I will try to summarize the answer in the following few points:

One has to understand what is happening and have a positive approach to it.

One has to feel a need for the new and a connection between the effort and the obtained advantage.

One has to feel a joint responsibility and a solidarity in the common task.

One has to feel these things also from the other side.

- - Did our Greenland policy ensure that those necessary conditions were present? We can look at them one at a time.

Understanding. "We must know what we want before we can act."

The words are again those of President Nyerere of Tanzania, the under-developed country which more than any other is obsessed by the thought of wanting to go it alone, because it is the only lasting method. In the same way President Kaunda of Zambia says: "A wise leader does everything to ensure that the logic of his policy is understood, so that the people can move together with him." It will never be possible to activate a mass of people who do not know what is going to happen and why. In Greenland we have never made an honest attempt to bring along the great masses as collaborators in the new task. We have practiced the AOF-methods used for Danes at home, which can be used as entertainment or occupational therapy for a Danish group of people which has mainly been absorbed as citizens, but which has no chance at all to appeal to the unengaged average man in Greenland and make him interested in the new development.

And it takes not only understanding and education to participate

in the complicated cooperation of a modern society, but it also takes experience and instruction about the many strange phenomena of this society, an orientation about the society in a very wide and elementary meaning. It appears that enlightenment of the people has not until now been taken so seriously by those responsible that it is possible to dream about sparing half a dozen trained people for this task, which is more unavoidable than any other if the New Order in Greenland is to succeed.

Effort and gain. If people are to give their best, they must first of all have a desire to achieve something, and then they must have an idea that their effort is a necessity to achieve what is desired, and that the reward will be in proportion to the effort.

I am afraid that none of these conditions are present. In reality the need for development is felt much more by the Danes in Greenland than by the Greenlanders themselves. And the Greenlanders know very well that things will happen as planned by the Danes, whether the Greenlanders go along or not. The Danish effort is so overwhelming that it does not make any real sense to the individual Greenlandic to enter the development as a conscious collaborator. As time goes by he rather gets to believe that a higher living standard is something you just sit and demand as a constitutional right - and that it is the duty of the Danes to bring it along. Often the money is so plentiful in relation to the need that the natural motivation for work is missing. The productive trades which alone can develop Greenland economically are hindered by the enormous public activity. Of course nobody will go to sea hunting or fishing when a certain and considerable income can be earned at the state activities ashore. Just recently a warning was expressed against the conditions in

Scoresbysund, where the hunting and fishing trade is being strangled by the public activity. On the Faeroe Islands a very exact balance between the public investments and the private trades has deliberately been established - in order to save the latter ones - in spite of a far stronger and more competitive fishing trade.

Solidarity. If you have to start cooperation you have to feel solidarity towards the unit with which the cooperation is concerned. You have to feel you belong to it, that you owe it something, and that you want to do something for it. If this feeling is to be maintained, it is also necessary that the others in the group show the same attitude and solidarity, and in particular those who are in front as leaders and instructors.

Again we must admit that the solidarity in Greenland is not doing p.167 so well. Those sent out, who no doubt have to be called the real leaders, are exactly those without solidarity. They only stay in the country for a short while, they send their money home to Denmark, they are transients, and may well enjoy the golden fruits of the enormous activity of the New Order, but they stand with one leg posed for jumping, ready to disappear, for they are not prepared to suffer and bleed if anything goes wrong. Their pay is sky-high above that of the local people and does not express any solidarity either.

Just about the same must no doubt be said about the Greenland elite. It is mainly concerned with safeguarding its own pay and rights and does nothing to stand united with the general population economically. It has secured itself a living standard which is not far from the Danish one, and sky-high above that of the workers and hunters and fishermen.

There is reason to ask: Where would the average Greenlander today get the

impulse to work and sacrifice for the unity?

Maybe one could imagine the Greenlanders becoming enthused on the national level, as it has happened in so many of the new countries, to rally around the enormous task of advancing their poor community together, spending blood, sweat, and tears. But they are not allowed to do so, because we are the ones who try to advance them, the Danish effort which overwhelms and rolls over everything, and one would have to disregard the facts to an incredible extent to find an inspiration to a common effort by the Greenlanders in all this. One is nearly tempted to sustain the pious wish that an efficient national prophet succeeded in exciting the people to such a degree that the strength of everybody could be united and gathered.

Or even if the people could only be made politically awake. No doubt the truth is, as shown by voting numbers, that the general population is rather indifferent politically. And there hardly exists any motivation to express yourself politically. Generally the living standard has increased faster than the naturally felt need for more money, and the material progress no doubt is exactly what puts people to sleep politically. And you can hardly expect an active cooperation from a population which is not politically conscious.

In his lecture in this assembly in January Magister Bent Jensen in an excellent way pointed out new ways to activate the general population in the development, namely through building upon the original forms of common effort and other traditions of the community, so that people naturally could take advantage of an already established structure. No doubt the thought is correct. Exactly in the small groups it would be possible to try and learn and experience on your own through cooperative organizations or other forms of cooperation, and from these common efforts

strength and reality could be poured into the greater things. It may also be said that today it is so difficult for the Greenlanders to dig in the shovel and get started on an initiative on their own that it cannot be expected in any case in areas where even the structure for the initiative must be created first.

Responsibility. "Now it is no longer "they", but "we", who are responsible." The above mentioned President Kaunda has tried to explain to his newly liberated people that while the blame previously only was put on the colonial power (they) every time something was unsatisfactory, and the demands for correction directed to that power, any criticism must now be directed towards ourselves, since we are now responsible. There is is a great incentive in the knowledge that you are responsible yourself, in knowing that if things are not done right the criticism will be directed towards oneself, and that you have to take the consequences yourself. It must be the natural development that greater national consciousness and self-esteem must also create greater economic responsibility - for it is all of a sudden your own money you are responsible for. p.168

Certainly we have taken away the responsibility from the Greenlanders to such a paralyzing extent that they do not feel any incentive in this area to dig in with both fists. They are not afraid of any criticism, of doing anything wrong, - for the Danes take the blame. Nor are they afraid of doing nothing, for it will be done anyway. They do not feel the responsibility which is concomitant with the positive right to participate in decisions. Many of them have even been torn out of their social connection and are no longer subjected to any daily social control, as they used to be, so that even from that side no incentive can be expected.

If I may be allowed again to fall back upon the words of a wise African, President Iyerere on the new village communities which he is trying to create in the country: "If we prevent people from making their own mistakes, we prevent the creation of the community. We can give advice and warn, but if we try to run it ourselves, we spoil it. We may have to pay a high price in terms of mistakes and disappointments as a result of this, but it is unavoidable."

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The conclusion must be that our Greenland policy does not appear to any large extent to advance that which must be its real purpose. To get the people started with their own development. And we have already dealt with the way of thinking which lies behind the policy carried out. There remains still a question: Where did this way of thinking originate? Who are really responsible for the policy that is being carried out?

The answer is in reality very complex. If one asks the politician why his decisions are as they are, he will very often refer to those officials, upon whose expertise he depends. If one then asks the official, he will either hand over the Black Jack to the politician and say: I carry out orders, even if I see clearly that they are wrong. Or he will refer to the professional expert and say that his expertise is decisive for the actions of an official. Or maybe he will refer to the public opinion, the pressure of the press and other media. If one asks the specialist, the expert in a profession, he will again refer to the declared aim: To attain Danish standard - and say that he only acts accordingly. Danish authorities will refer to the desires on Greenland - and the authorities in Greenland to Danish predominance. What makes it even harder to swallow is that the opinion of the Greenlanders very often will be the opinion of those sent

out from Denmark to reside in Greenland, such as it appears for instance p.169 in the local papers, which are controlled by people sent out.

Nobody will accept the real responsibility - and no doubt one is often quite sincere when saying so. It is difficult to get to the root of the problem, but at any rate we can try to understand that those instances to whom we each want to shift the responsibility, in no way agree to this, but maybe believe to have received their views from us. The responsibility for the policy carried out falls on all of us: On the formally responsible politicians, Danish as well as from Greenland, who may behave spinelessly before officials and experts, on the officials who insist on their own expertise when it suits them and on their freedom for political responsibility when that suits them, on the pressure group of people sent to Greenland, on the public pressure in Greenland, on the press and radio and TV in Denmark, which force both politicians and officials to act in a certain way and which at the same time believes to be free of responsibility itself, on the specialists and the professional people, who for the sake of the prestige of the profession or personal ambition often abuse their authority to carry through an untenable practice, on authorities at home in Denmark who through misunderstood idealism force Danish rules upon Greenland, when they are only a hindrance and a calamity.

A change of the policy carried out presupposes that all parties understand the problematics, both in Greenland and here in this country. It is a slow and maybe painful process, and it requires a clear and determined effort from many sides. And it is necessary! For our Greenland project, haunted by difficulties, problems, and trade catastrophies, can in any event only survive if all Greenlanders place their own human and economic forces on the scale.

Now I know many will say: All this criticism is very fine. But where does it lead us? Let us have an alternative, let us know what we should do in a concrete way. This is only a half completed task.

Actually I cannot accept this objection. Placed in front of a project as complex as the New Order in Greenland any attempt at a change has to start with clarifying the principles, finding out exactly what is wrong now - and from this realization one then has to try to establish some new criteria for the future efforts, criteria which to some extent will establish themselves by contrast from the given analysis. To shape a practical policy in detail is not a task for one man, although the individual person may well assist in establishing these criteria.

And I will finish by tentatively mentioning a few such guidelines, which as far as I can see ought to be valid for any future effort in Greenland:

- (1) A higher living standard must not necessarily be given first priority. p.170
- (2) Attempts should be made to limit and if possible reduce the number of people sent out. The chain reaction of new and greater demands which is caused by their presence, may possibly be halted in this way.
- (3) Local initiative should not be hindered even by important investments.
- (4) The level of investments must be adjusted to the conditions of the country itself and to the level of development that has been reached.
- (5) The productive trades must not be destroyed by public activities.

- (6) It must be attempted to create a clear relation between the efforts of the population and the support that comes from outside.
- (7) Attempts must be made to take advantage of existing social norms such as, for instance, those suggested by Bent Jensen: cooperatives, decentralization, and arrangement of group units within the frame of the new town plans.
- (8) Everything must be done to make the general population participate in the development - and until then no decisive choices must be made by the Greenlanders.
- (9) A means of slowing down the activity must be sought, so that the community can find a more normal pace.
- (10) So much responsibility must be given to the Greenlanders that it really can become a challenge.

I could actually believe that the Greenlanders themselves would subscribe to these criteria upon reflection. In any event it would be unfortunate if they were to be introduced against the wishes of the Greenlanders, even if they too are not always sacrosanct.

I have nothing against my sent-out colleagues as individuals, and I recognize their diligence and efforts in Greenland. But it would still be a day of joy, if one were allowed to see the last of the sent-out ones leave Søndre Strømf in one of the supersonic aircraft of the future. Then one would start to believe that Greenland was getting into its own - and then it would otherwise be of secondary importance to me whether it took place as a Danish province, greater municipality, self-governing community inside the kingdom or something quite different.

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